

CPRE WEST MIDLANDS REGION

Manifesto for the West Midlands Countryside



“We at the CPRE in the West Midlands want to ensure that the precious and attractive assets we have in our local natural countryside are protected for future generations. We cannot do that alone. We need our politicians to be absolutely committed to not only maintaining, but enhancing our countryside for our children and our children’s children. We therefore seek a serious and firm commitment from every politician of every party to wholeheartedly pledge to protect and enrich our rural areas for the future of all our people.”

Bryan McGinity
Chairman
CPRE West Midlands



Campaign to Protect
Rural England
WEST MIDLANDS

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The goal of the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) is to safeguard the beauty and tranquillity of the countryside, now and into the future. CPRE has published a National Manifesto for the Countryside which focuses on a number of critical actions CPRE would seek from a new Government in the 2010-2015 Parliament.

In the West Midlands we want national and local politicians to produce not only the best solutions to meet the challenge of housing and transport, but also to both address climate change and protect the wider environment.

Our West Midlands region includes large tracts of attractive countryside, as well as particular areas of outstanding natural beauty, including the Malvern, Clent and Shropshire Hills, Long Mynd, Cannock Chase and the Black Mountains. We are looking to West Midlands politicians to protect and proactively enhance the landscape across our five Shire counties and to further improve the environment of our towns and cities.

We have identified seven critical issues that CPRE in the West Midlands want addressed in order to protect and enrich the rural areas within our region. These are:

1. Getting Development Right

It is vital that we concentrate resources on rebuilding and regenerating our towns and cities in our region, so that they are seen by all as pleasant and appealing locations for living, working and leisure. We also need any new housing to be linked to employment opportunities and the complete supporting infrastructure.

Housing:

We need the right houses in the right locations and this involves carefully controlling housing development in rural areas in order to minimise any further long term erosion of our countryside.

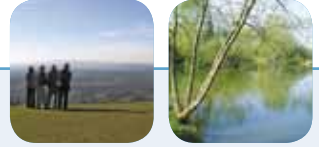
We need to match housing with the needs of our people. This implies a primary responsibility to concentrate on affordable housing, and to build only the houses we need, rather than relying on vague future projections. Houses should only be built to a design, and with materials that are appropriate to the locality, and specifically where there are relevant employment opportunities and access to services.

Infrastructure and Employment:

We need to invest in an effective and efficient infrastructure that gives comprehensive access to employment, education, health units, shops and leisure opportunities.



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2. Protecting the Green Belt

We have welcomed the support from politicians across the region for the West Midlands Green Belt. Due to the hard work and commitment of West Midlands environmentalists, politicians and campaigners the West Midlands Green Belt covers some 20% of West Midlands land.

The Green Belt has successfully protected the beauty of our countryside and blocked arbitrary urban sprawl. We want all parties to commit to maintaining the Green Belt within the West Midlands and not allow it to be nibbled away, so suffering death by a thousand cuts through new development.

We also seek investment to protect and enhance the Green Belt and to promote improved access to what is many people's local countryside.

We also (as highlighted in our National CPRE Manifesto) want to expand further the Green Belt in the West Midlands by adding two new sites, one surrounding Worcester and the other surrounding Telford.

3. Conserving and Promoting Farming

The recent Food 2030 report highlights the vital need for Britain to become more self sustaining in food production. One key element of that report is the need to develop and vigorously promote sustainable local food networks. This is a topic which is fully supported by CPRE and is a prime activity within CPRE nationally and its West Midland branches.

It is critical for the future of our country and our region that we protect our agricultural and farming land, particularly the prime and most versatile lands, from all forms of development.

We call for all political parties to give full recognition and support to the West Midlands farming community. We would seek effective rewards be given for efficient farming methods, food production, local food networks as well as the delivery of landscape conservation. The need for a strong UK farming industry is an essential element of our Vision for the West Midlands in this century.

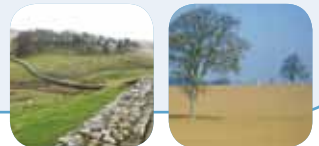
4. Investing in a first-rate Public Transport System

Our region has suffered from a lack of a regional vision linked to an implementation plan for major investment in a local and regional integrated public transport system.

We need our politicians to consider and plan for a superb public transport structure which is at least equivalent to the central regions of comparable European countries.

This should be based on:

1. Flexible and efficient bus routes acting as the core of the service for both rural and urban neighbourhoods.
2. Investment in restoring the local rail network with improved reliability and frequency, less overcrowding, longer platforms as well as upgraded freight lines. Investment in additional intercity and long distance capacity needs to complement, not compete with this ambition.
3. Maximising the more efficient use of our existing road and highways infrastructure in order to reduce the need for expensive new road systems.



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5. The voice of the people engaged in strategic and local decision making.

People in the West Midlands need to be listened to in all key strategic regional and local decisions. Organisations in the voluntary sector, such as CPRE, have played a central role in developing relevant strategies and contributing their expertise to plans and actions across the West Midlands. New political structures are being introduced across the region and we need a continuing strong independent voice to represent the environmental and rural concerns on behalf of all concerned and committed residents.

6. Creating a thriving and beautiful Countryside

We require politicians to genuinely value the rural landscape and heritage of the West Midlands countryside, not only for its own sake but because it adds to the attractiveness of the region, and the welfare of our local citizens.

We want to see innovative and practical solutions for developing our rural communities and ensuring all-inclusive access to relevant services. Politicians must listen to West Midlands rural communities and take note of their concerns when considering new plans involving public transport, energy developments, housing, schools, post offices, libraries, shops, leisure centres or medical services.

A critical issue is the failure to deliver a full Broadband service to rural areas. At minimum this is essential if Government programmes on education and economic development are to succeed. We would seek a commitment to eliminate the disadvantage suffered by rural communities and businesses. Broadband should be delivered to all, irrespective of their residence or business location.

7. Protecting Tranquillity

Tranquillity is increasingly valued in our hectic world. CPRE has been at the forefront in defining, measuring and mapping tranquillity across England. We need politicians to recognise the value of that work through stronger protection for our valuable tranquil areas. The region boasts some of the most tranquil areas in the country, such as the Marches, but there are also areas of relative tranquillity within even the busiest urban areas, which are equally valued by the public. We want a commitment by Government and politicians to protect areas of tranquillity, both in rural and urban areas for our children and our children's children.

Summary

The seven critical issues listed above are crucial problems for the West Midlands which can be resolved to the benefit of all our local citizens through the wholehearted commitment and support from parliamentary candidates in the forthcoming General Election. We would seek this personal commitment from each and every candidate.

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